



**CREATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLAND IN
COMPARAISON WITH EUROPEAN
EXPERIENCES**

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Creation of civil society in Poland in comparison to European experience

Abstract

From many of the definitions of the civil society one seemed to me interesting and useful to this dissertation. According to the meaning of the civil society presented on web pages of The World Bank, this the array of non-governmental and non-for-profit organizations that had a presence in public life, expressing the interest and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. This term was also defined by the European Economic and Social Committee as "the sum of all organizational structures whose members had objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens".

To make it possible to talk about civil society there must be a friendly atmosphere. The best kind of the environment is a democracy. Only then can function freely the non-governmental objects. The civil society is based on voluntarism and predicated on giving the widest possible latitude to the individual. Each citizen (each Miller, Smith or each Kowalski) can choose whether to participate in such organizations or to spend his free time sitting in front of the TV and zapping. Expansion of the democratic governance is one of the main factors, which caused the expansion of civil society. There is a theory, that the stronger is the consciousness of the society, the bigger is the citizens participation in public life - especially on the local level. It has strong influence on the number of people, who go to vote. On the other hand, it is the sign of the acceptance of the rulers and their governing methods. Poland, from its beginning, is the part of European family. From 1989 is also considerate as a democratic partner. We grab the opportunity to use experiences of oldies democracies as much as we can to increase the level of democratic transformation. However, the whole process is not so easy and straight forward.

Political, economical and social changes started in 1989 happens very fast and the polish political class still is not steadily shaped. All process occur in the same time, which make it no easier or faster. A lot of obstacles had been already lifted but is still a lot of changes to carry out. The percent of the people, who attend CS organizations is gradually increasing since 1989, especially among youth and students.

Does the Poland adhesion to the European Community can influence on the process of development of civil society in Poland?

Does the closer relations with the stable democracies (exchange of experiences, ideas, but also problems) and the good patterns from them can cause the increase of the attendance of Polish citizens in local issues?

If the danger of being "second class member" is serious because of the short history of civil society in Poland?

Keywords: Civil Society in Poland, European Union

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PART I

INTRODUCTION

The origins of the concept of civil society lie in key phases of modernity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Writers in classical philosophy and political economy began to distinguish systematically between the spheres of state and society. The term civil society was first used to distinguish a sphere in which social relations were based on the free association of individuals, rather than a fixed hierarchy of legal institutions. For classical writers, like the philosopher Georg Hegel, “civil society is a sphere of contradictions which could be resolved in the higher institution of the state, which embodied the highest ethical ideals of society”. Civil society for Gramsci (the Italian Marxist, writing in the 1930s) was a set of institutions through which society organised and represented itself autonomously from the state.

“In Aristotle’s philosophy, conception of ‘**koinonia politike**’, which latin equivalent is ‘**societas civilis**’, set against political community, against city or state. In the classic philosophy, natural law philosophers or adherents of the conception of civil agreement (or civil contract) between citizens, (like Thomas Hobbes or John Lock) are comparing civil society to politically organized association.”¹ We should also mention another conception, which was defined by Aristotle. I think about human, described as “homo socius” and “homo civitas”. From his nature, human is doomed to living among other people without any really chances for surviving and development out of society, nor in psychical dimension, nor in material. Only in civil society, human can make serious decisions about his life.

According to traditional “triadical” model of civil society, it constitutes domain of social interactions, which is placed between economy and the state. This sphere consists of three main spheres:

- 1) intimate sphere, covering family, friends,
- 2) sphere of different associations based mainly on the volunteering of their members and directed on the charity,
- 3) sphere of mass movements and other forms of public communication.

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¹ Chaniel Philippe , *Société civile, société civique? Associationisme, libéralisme et républicanisme* [in:] Laville Laville J-L., Caille A., Chaniel P., Dacheux E., Eme B., Latouche S., *Association, démocratie et société civile*, Editions La Découverte et Syros, Paris 2001, pages 141-142

On the other hand “civil society” *should be perceived and analyzed as vector of process of democratization of political institutions.*²

Political dimension of civil society focuses not only on a defense of autonomy of this society, especially against menaces which could influence the integration of the state or of the market, but also on the development of the democratization’s process, including the above mentioned spheres, the reinforcement of the peoples engagement and leads to annihilation of traditionally hierarchical scheme, where society is submitted to a state.

Meaning of the term “civil society” is closely connected with definition of the “individual with democratic personality”. An individual with democratic personality characterizes: open and friendly attitude towards others, and inner warmness and calmness, ability to respect others views and ideas, even if he/she doesn’t share them, and in the sphere of values – pluralistic disposition. Such person is not susceptible to phobias and superstitions, and he trusts his environment. People, who have such personality compose the framework of civil society. Because of them, the society is opened, knows its rights but also its duties and obligations, and is highly organized (high number of associations, foundations and political parties). The citizens are likely to engage themselves in different social initiatives. Obviously, development of civil society depends not only on the people who create this society. There must arise many other circumstances favor to its rise, for instance: high level of the welfare, political culture, education etc.

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² Ibidem, page 143

PART II

DESCRIPTION OF KEY ISSUES NECESSARILY TO CREATE CIVIL SOCIETY.

In the time of important social and political changes, which we can observe presently in Poland, reconstruction of over-family relationship through encouraging people to participate in mass movements and associations, becomes real “helping hand” for the local government. Similar problems, common initiatives – this are main factors which brings closer and unite inhabitants of one street, quarter, city or region, and forms unique tie.

Unfortunately, one of the most characteristics Polish imperfection, is inability to creative cooperation for constructing a new value or just for improving already existing order. History clearly proofs, that the most profitable partnership between polish people is formed, when we are forced to face danger or we have to fight against any force. Incessantly growing magnitude of the society and the strength of local governments (citizen movements) appears to be a “green light” for civil society.

In this area, globalization is replaced by regional settlements and decisions. In many european countries exist e.g. associations for preservation of nature in the neighborhood, organizations caring about constructing children’s playgrounds in their quarters or engagement in the cross border relation with the neighbor’s regions. Experience of many years of cooperation and the long practice in such activity in the countries of Western Europe, allows them to become a perfect example to follow for young democracies like Poland. Their failures shows what should be avoided. This is sometimes hard and bitter, but also very useful lesson.

Citizens engagement in the issue as which reefers them directly is also issue of their consciousness. What must be remembered is that stimulation of the feeling of collective identity, has strong and straight influence on the growth of the number of people actively participating in a variety of local affairs.

Decentralization and self-government

Democracy is connected with broad access of society to the power through its representatives.

Centralization and decentralization are the issues of state territorial organization. Centralization Leads to the state in which people are less and less interested in politics and public issues. This process is in conflict with democracy, because it takes away the possibility of taking care of issues, which concerns them directly, from citizens. Its also makes impossible to identify with the authority. The authority becomes the imposed one.

Decentralization is indispensable, but not sufficient condition for proper functioning of the democracy. What is necessary, is the broad participation of citizens in the authority; participation on every grade of authority. “The lower level of state intervention, the better” – this is the fundamental postulate of the system, based on such rules as democracy, decentralization and self-government. In spite of many obstacles which were banked up before civil organizations before 1989, most of them outlasted. They are operating in new environment, but often they are fulfilling new duties, which differ slightly from the old one. Such organizations had to adapt their programs according to continuously broadening market of possibilities. Moreover, they had to adjust to new legal conditions. Level of the education is higher and higher. This process leads to the growth of civil consciousness and – what is closely related – growth of engagement in local issues.

Importance of the local government and active society was seen and emphasized by all the main parties in Poland. During the discussion about the administrative reform, which was held in the years 1996-1998, there was no counting party, which would be against local government. Reform of the administration was enacted in Poland in 1998. Since then, people got to three levels of local government. All the problems, which appeared on the early stage of this reform, have been successfully solved and are now forgotten. Strong local government with vast competences is also guaranteed in the Polish Constitution from 1997 (articles from 163 to 172).

At present, local governments have to incite the people’s interest in local political life. The situation, when only 25-35 % of voters go to the ballot boxes, is one of the most important challenges ahead.

Subsidiarity

Idea of civil society reflects a kind of priority of citizens above their state. State and government should support social activity, putting in this as much effort as much it can. From the other side, it should avoid creating institutions, which could disturb or what’s even more harmful, to replace citizens activity. In other words, state should give its aid to substitute

families instead of orphanage; to civil, charity actions and to social welfare offices; to rather local than central authorities. Only then state becomes a “higher instance organization”, playing crucial role in such domains and on such levels, where citizens can not act separately and independently.

This structure, where state activity is reduced to unavoidably minimum is called “subsidiarity”.

PART III

CIVIL SOCIETY IN POLAND

Group activities and social movements are considerably new issue in Poland. Special interest in mass movements began in 80 s of XX th century, as a result of social, economical, and what was most important, political changes. The best evidence of this process was Solidarność. Creation and rapid development of non government organization, which united people from different social classes: factory workers, students, intellectuals, symbolize the change in civil consciousness. Undoubtedly, it was also, the turning point in the fight with the contemporary regime. In that moment turned out, that it is possible to undertake efficient mass activities without participation of the state. There has always been autonomy in Poland. The regime threaded it as a safety regulator for society’s moods. Moreover it was sophisticated way of gaining approval of western politics and journalist. In such way, the regime tried to hide its true aims. From the other hand, some organizations could work freely, like Polish Red Cross.

In spite of the strict control of the state and the government, under which were all kind of group activity, a strong desire and pressure for active participation in social life revealed in the early 80`s. Changes, which were happening in Poland in 80`s and 90`s were not deep and vast enough to form a final shape of civil society. The huge number and fierceness of his changes had the most visible influence on his situation. Hitherto the society was a little sleepy. At that moment, it was given the useful instrument. At the beginning the society didn’t know how to used it. Democratization process, starting from the registration of the Solidarność, and furthermore through the democratic parliamentary and presidential elections

and introduction of the capitalistic model of the state economy, covering the free market and the equivalence of all entities) caused the accumulation different occurrences in one moment.

The same occurrences happened in the countries with stable democracy, but unlikely, they were disposed for the many decades, if not even for centuries. For instance in France the first democratic Act of Associations was enacted in 1901; in Poland the liberal Act of Associations was passed in polish parliament in 1989.

In 80`s, and even earlier, there was a regulation concerning this matter, under which the officials decided if the association could function and how vast should be the domain of its interest, it was impossible to talk about freedom of associations.

The democratization process was parallel to the establishment of administration based on new political ideas and forming of the new political culture. The idea of „political culture” describes Jerzy Wiatr in his book entitled „Politics sociology”. According to this polish scientist, the ‘political culture is the entirety of attitudes, values and behavior patterns, covering the mutual relations between the government and citizens’.³

The political culture contains of:

- 1) knowledge of politics, including internal and international political facts; interest in politics’ issues
- 2) ability of estimating the rank of different political events; of evaluating what is the quality of the government and how it looks like;
- 3) emotional side of politics, covering the motherland’s love and also ill will, antipathy or even hate to their opponents and enemies;
- 4) recognized, in the given society, patterns of political behaviors, which describe what is acceptable and desired/welcome; the description of the proper political life style;

Level of the interest of the public issues among the polish people rational evaluation still leaves much to be desired. Emotions (often not only the antipathy but even the hostility to political opponents) are transferred into social level, what obstructs or even hinders initiation and participation in common undertakings. In the past regime, the government and the party tried to control the development of the society and to impose social patterns, hierarchy of the

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³ Jerzy J. Wiatr, *Socjologia polityki (Politics sociology)*, Warszawa 1999, page 189

values, habits and customs. The elite attempt to realize models from other socialist countries. "This can be the reason for seeing the state as hostile institutions, which doesn't serve but rules and punishes."⁴

The changes after 1989

When in the early '90s Poland was on the verge of the process of democratization the public live, it suffered because of the lack of democratic traditions. It was a consequence of historical conditions (wars, occupations), which interfered with a continuation of the 'democratic course' introduced and carried by the previous generation. The most important moments in polish history of evolutions of democratic attitudes and the creation of first governmental bodies was related to the annexation time in the XVIII century.

After the second war, there were laid the foundations of the movement of rising the non-governmental organizations. This tendency has continued until nowadays and we can observe still increasing number of these organizations. The question is what the non-governmental organization is? Straightly speaking, it is a kind of organization which bring people together in a common cause. Andrzej Antoszewski quotes Jerzy Szacki: "The key issue of the civil society idea, which was disseminated by anti-communistic opposition, was to aim at creation of the network of independent institutions, which constituted an intermediate sphere. This sphere must have two main factors: distinctly from private sphere it would be public one; at the same time, distinctly from state-owned public sphere it would be the social one."⁵

Nowadays

Situation seems to be under control presently. Development of the society's consciousness was ensuing simultaneously with the democratic changes. However, the bigger

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⁴ B. Rogowska, *Kościół rzymskokatolicki a społeczeństwo obywatelskie*, [in:] *Spoleczeństwo - Państwo - Kościół*, red. A. Kawecki, K. Kowalczyk, A. Kubaj, Szczecin 2000, s. 170

⁵ A. Antoszewski, *Spoleczeństwo obywatelskie a proces konsolidacji demokracji (Civil society and the process of democratic consoildation* [in:] *Studia z teorii polityki, (Research of political theory)* vol. II, red. A. W. Jabłońskiego i L. Sobkowiaka, Wrocław 1998, page.10

part of Polish people still doesn't take part in public or/and social life. More than a half of surveys (59%) says, that they didn't spend their free time on social activities, neither made a financial support for charity/voluntary initiatives in 2003. It's wondering, that more than a half of mature Polish people don't want to engage themselves in helping others. The most frequently mentioned factor, which was used to excuse lack of interest, was necessity of taking care over family – 58% of Polish people.

Second, most frequent given reason is lack of time (43,6%). Four out of ten persons didn't engage because they never were asked to do so, or because they are not interested in such form of spending free time at all. 20% had bad experiences with the volunteering or giving financial supports in the past, and it has influence on their present attitude so strongly and deeply, that they are generally discouraged. Luckily, it is mentioned on the last place. Students and group of teenagers in the age between 18 and 25, graduated, workers employed in full working time - these groups predominate among those, who actively take part in public life.

Volunteers asked what laid upon their motivation pointed at moral, religious and political beliefs (83%). However, still 70,6% of respondents emphasized their interests in this matter or they draw the pleasure of working in this sector.

In 2003 54% Polish people gave the aid in the form of offerings or time in favor to those, who need this kind of help, without agency of non-governmental organizations. On the other hand, in the same year almost 60% of Polish population spent their time or donate some amount through the mediation of the non-governmental organizations.⁶

In comparison with the research carried out in Great Britain we observe:

- 65% of people participated socially in groups, clubs or organisations at least once in the last 12 months. This is equivalent to approx 27 million people in England and Wales.
- 38% of people were involved in civic participation at least once in the last 12 months. Equivalent to approx 16 million people in England and Wales.
- 39% of people volunteered formally (through groups, clubs or organisations) at least once in the last 12 months. Equivalent to approx 16 million people in England and Wales.

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⁶ www.klon/jawor.org.pl

- 67% of people volunteered informally (as individuals) at least once in the last 12 months. Equivalent to approx 28 million people in England and Wales.
- 43% of people agreed that they could influence decisions affecting their local areas

Source: Home Office Citizenship Survey 2001

There is approximately 45.000 of non-governmental organizations registered in Poland, including different associations and foundations. If we base on the wide definition of non governmental organization, covering unions, the economical self-government, churches and religious associations, it would be more than 90 000. According to the assessments of KLON (the organization which research the non-governmental sector), more than 66 % of them is functioning actively and, what is even more important - successfully. Poland is at the second position in the index of level of development of non-governmental organizations in the post-socialistic countries This Index includes datas from 28 countries in Europe and Asia. (Source: USAID/ Freedom House/ KLON_200)

Employment: in the state (governmental) sector works more than 1000.000 people, what is about 1 % of the employees working in the national economy, without agriculture. For comparison: in Romania this indicator is 0,6%; In Holland -12,6 %) {Source: International research of non-profit sector Johns Hopkins University / KLON - 1997}.⁷

One of the most significant changes, which can and should happen after the social and economical revolution, is the reconstruction of the over family relations mainly trough development of vast variety of associations and local government. Without stimulation and shaping active, local attitudes, it is impossible to reconstruct the social relationship necessary for civil society.

Ideology of collectivism known from the past, which was manifested by for instance group decisions undertaking and common actions, nowadays discourage for activities, which are based on the same assumption. People are distrustful and not likely to solving common problems by cooperation. Part of the citizens, which is overpowered by the countless number of problems, which used to be solved by the state, become apathetic and assumed a waiting attitude. Political, economical and social education is indispensable element of every

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⁷ www.klon/jawor.org.pl

democratic order. Conscious citizenship and self-government are impossible without knowledge of rights and duties, procedures and features typical to democracy.

PART IV

POLISH MEMBERSHIP IN EUROPEAN UNION AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY – CONCLUSIONS AND QUESTIONS

The Polish membership in a huge number of international organizations allows to an active participation in global undertakings. More and more problems and public menaces become universal. This means that they start to concern more than one country or nation. His universal problems include such issues as protection of natural environment, population growth and fight against poverty. International cooperation on the world platform seems to be the best and the most efficient form of solving these problems. These non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are particularly important not only in that, although based in the West, they operate across the globe, but also because many are 'globalist' organizations with a specifically global orientation, membership and activity. There are however other major types of institutions which comprise the emergent global, regional and transnational civil society. These include formal organizations linking national organizations of parties, churches, unions, professions, educational bodies, media, etc

Polish citizens already put some effort in gaining from our membership in the EU. Poland was the first member of the EU, which only after 100 days of the 1st May 2004, obtained and used more grants than the height of its fee.

Polish accession to the European Union gives a possibility for joint action in new domains and (what is also important) for exchanging experiences and opinions. This new reality raises several questions. If for the sake of civilization's delay, Poland won't become in the bosom of the Union, the second category member? A weak participation, low level of activity and the fact that political culture is still developed insufficiently – can inconveniences influence on Polish position in Europe 25? Will be the Poland threatened as substantial discussion partner in the NGO area?

Does the Polish accession to the European Community can influence on the process of development of civil society in Poland?

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